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Criticize CIA—But Carefully

Rep. Leslie Arends of Illinois, a member of the House subcommittee on the Central Intelligence Agency, yesterday came to the CIA's defense against what he termed "irresponsible" charges printed in a New York newspaper series that the agency has been infiltrated by Soviet intelligence. Arends called the CIA "the finest intelligence agency in the world today."

Connecticut Sen. Thomas Dodd, himself as sharp a watchdog of government operations as any in Washington, similarly felt obliged some weeks ago to speak up in the CIA's behalf.

Dodd's point: That whatever the CIA's mistakes and failures—and it has had both, though not as many as some suggest—it is vital to our security and critics have a responsibility to be sure of their facts and to speak with restraint when they attack it.

He observed that "baiting the CIA almost seems to have achieved the stature of a popular national pastime. It is a highly dangerous pastime because the CIA is one of the essential elements of our security."

Additionally, the CIA is handicapped in defending itself by the very nature of its mission. It cannot answer even the most grotesquely incorrect ac-

cusations or move publicly to set the record straight where facts have been misrepresented.

We must have faith that the agency is doing the job it was created for, and doing it as well as possible. In this respect it is useful to keep in mind that the CIA is not a totally free agent which can "run wild" all over the world with no control or supervision. Both in Congress and in the administration there is knowledge of current CIA operations. Some of them will succeed, some will fail. But none will be served by making them a matter of public knowledge.

"I am not suggesting that the CIA should be immune to criticism because of the sensitive nature of its operations," Sen. Dodd said. "No government agency should be immune from criticism. I do believe, however, that there has been far too much sensationalism, far too many inaccuracies, and far too little concern for the national security in some of the criticism that has heretofore been made of the CIA."

The News agrees. Incessant attacks, most of them groundless, not only on the CIA but on virtually every American institution, can only add up to cumulative deterioration of our faith in the nation. We are not perfect—no one suggests that. But neither are we about to fall victim to sinister shadows some profess to see lurking in every nook and cranny of our society.

Let's be on guard against our enemies. But let's also be on guard against "friends" whose whispered or shouted counsel is no more constructive than "you can't trust anybody."